

## *In Defense of the Spotted Lanternfly (after Hanif Abdurraqib)*

*for Pauly Likens,  
B Murray, & all my trans kin  
who were killed for their beauty;*

*for Palestine;*

*for us all*

dear reader, you might spot a war of subdued Black & scarlet  
against bark & think of the lanternfly's starve, its beg  
for attention, its unwanted defiance of fists. You might think  
it sad, unwanted—why, if so voracious as to be called

pest, would anything keep asking more of the world?  
How might we cull a weed back into its place, of what is deserved  
& what freedoms avalanche into a danger? Sometimes,

I am tasted plural before heard, chewed  
into a waltz of names on a palm waiting to pretty me

into a meadow of aster. yes, I've been a pest, preachy, blues  
hymned of a body free, plentiful, capable of flight & therefore

a danger. Remember: we holler & y'all hear, but our grief  
is exotic: unfamiliar & often, unsaid. A bloom is a soft destruction,  
so what am I becoming if not a slow lightning, an explosion  
of silences?

Consider again the lanternfly does not make noise, booms  
into purpura blot, its red underbelly the suggestion of anything  
but quiet in life, in its many denied burial grounds. The sidewalk prettied

into a carmine halo of concrete flowers: a corpse graffiti protesting  
displacement—even if a small percent are lucky to survive<sup>1</sup>. Here,  
we have the splayed crimson interior, once a vessel for love & love-

weaving. There, a head, tenderly  
ground into exoskeleton gristle, completely. In a state-sponsored  
murder, one surviving splash of reddened-Black can be best named

as an act of defiance. In truth, the lanternfly thrives in spite of us  
because it is disappointed. Because it can scream ache  
& suffocate & no one will ask its field of bashed wings

what its every language of survival & grief is because of. Yes,  
even when the field is before us all, I still have to ask

how best should I scatter their scarlet blues across your skin  
to scream *fuck you*, to say it with my chest. To destroy you & your emotions

completely. A wing, its flower-petal geometry, too, is bladed. Know  
its tender cleave. Know even its bite deserves to be cradled  
with softness.

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<sup>1</sup> Go back. Look straight ahead. There are no statistics to hide inside when the bodies are right in front of us.